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# The Spider on the Windowsill

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## The Spider on the Windowsill · *Greg Kuzma*

Barb painted the sill last week  
and its foot stuck to the strip  
along the edge. Or I did it.  
Or I like to think it was out  
walking and Barb drew her brush  
along the edge and a few bristles  
ran over the outstretched foot  
of the spider. Brushing by the  
way traffic does, and we are  
almost under the wheels, the wind  
blowing our hair back at the crosswalk.  
We found it a week later. It was  
still there, in the same spot, on the  
sill of the north window in our  
daughter's room. Saturday to Saturday,  
while we were living our lives, going  
to school, fretting and worrying.  
I played racquetball four times, twice  
with Rick, twice with Paul,  
ecstatic to get on the court after  
the long and frustrating days in class.  
Got some manuscripts back, sulked  
in my office, dabbled a little on the  
computer, wrote a few letters, sent  
the books out again. I had wanted  
to give up, and throw in the towel.  
One book's been rejected seven  
times in the past four months. I  
made multiple copies—which made  
my heart skip a bit—on the unlikely  
chance that the book would be  
taken twice on the same day,  
and I would have to choose, and  
make another enemy. Meanwhile

the spider waited. There might have been a moment right away that with some awesome effort it might have yanked its foot free. But the paint was the quick-dry variety, and locked up fast. And there was the strong smell of it too, which must have made its eyes tear. We didn't go back to the room. Barb was busy in school, ten classes a day, sudden shifts from science to German to theatre to art, her inventions unit, which involved the whole school, her ambassadors of her own making, which meets before school on Fridays, and in the evenings our frantic meals, before I'm off to the library for a night of study. There were all kinds of crises. We had a visiting poet, who was coming to one of my classes, which I fretted over. Monday I worked hard late reading over her new book, trying to do a preview reading in my classes, trying to do justice to her without envy or rancor—remembering my conduct of six years back, where I would welcome them and then betray them in a review. Which I can hardly talk about, it seems so awful now. Remembering that, trying to make up for it, trying to be attentive and respectful, trying to become Karen Swenson, and

think like she does. There I  
was sitting in my chair in a  
study carrell at Doane Library,  
reading the book over and over,  
trying to absorb Karen Swenson  
into my being. Meanwhile the  
spider settled down. It sat,  
or perhaps rather, lay, flat on  
the windowsill, dropping the weight  
of its body firmly onto the sill  
(which we did not hear, being  
busy in the kitchen), taking the  
weight off its legs. It shifted  
to get comfortable, or rubbed the  
trapped leg with one of its  
other legs, to keep the circulation  
up, to prevent cramping.  
Later there were noises in the house.  
Squirrels chased each other  
across high sections of the roof,  
and once, maybe it was around  
midweek, midday on a Wednesday  
perhaps, a squirrel came  
down the side of the house,  
and, clinging to the stucco siding  
with its nails, and latching  
onto a few old vines with its feet,  
hung there beside the window,  
and looked in. Perhaps the  
spider saw him, or perhaps it  
was sleeping then. Karen arrived,  
we did the class. I was pretty  
nervous. I saw right away she was  
not going to talk about the book  
I read, and tried to steer her  
to it, on account of all the  
questions I had made. We

struggled for a few minutes,  
maybe ten, I trying to  
attach myself more firmly  
to her, she trying to break free.  
We were like a spider stuck on  
a glass plate, like a spider  
and its mirror image. Everything  
she did I countered her. Everything  
I did she countered me. Until,  
exhausted, we surrendered.  
The students sat there the whole  
time, as if they were themselves  
the ones trapped, and did not  
interfere, did not come to our  
rescue. And then the remorse,  
like waves over me, clamped  
down in my chair in my office,  
afraid to be seen, ashamed of  
myself for having imposed myself,  
and for our weird dancing in  
public. Somehow, by an effort  
almost superhuman, I dragged myself  
out of my chair and climbed  
the stair, and went in to where  
Karen was talking, and apologized.  
If I had not, would I be  
sitting there still? And the  
world gone by me in a rush?  
Stuck in the tar of remorse,  
and almost lost. Meanwhile the  
spider was spending a long week.  
Mostly it slept, mostly it just  
lay there. Outside the window  
the world's weather paraded  
itself. And then the end of  
the parade, a few stragglers,  
the remnants of a band, a little

movement in the branches of the  
cedar tree, a swish of green  
across the pane. Of course  
it got very hungry. Barb and  
I were out to dinner at an  
expensive restaurant. A tiny  
chip of spiced lamb fell off  
my fork to the table top. The  
spider could have kept alive a  
year on what I could not see.  
Then it was Friday night.  
Another party at the country  
club. A night of golf, then  
dinner at a steak house. I got  
involved in a long political  
discussion with Steve Rische.  
I was astonished he knew so  
much, astonished that I could  
follow what he said. We sat there  
for two hours, locked in our  
chairs, as the chaos of the  
evening passed around us. I did  
not hear another voice, or even  
eat my food. It was like  
young love, entirely transfixed.  
The next day at last was  
Saturday. It's the day Barb  
and I have reserved for  
working on the house. I slept  
in as usual, she up at 9:00.  
But by eleven thirty we were  
gathering the tools. I was to  
be outside primarily, scraping  
brown paint off the window,  
where I had been in a hurry  
six or seven years before, —  
who was this maniac of six

or seven years before? How  
did we live? Up on the ladder  
on the north side I found a  
comfortable position, while  
Barb looked over our paint job  
from the week before and worked  
sewing the curtains she was  
putting up. We talked to each  
other through the window. It  
was a mild day. "What's this?"  
Barb said. A spider stuck  
to the paint. With the end of the tip  
of her nail she cut the tiny tip  
of the spider's leg off,  
setting it free. On one of  
my trips inside to get coffee  
and look at my work from the  
other side, I saw the spider.  
One of the eight legs was  
noticeably shorter. There it  
was, running back and forth  
along the windowledge. An hour  
later I was back inside for more  
coffee, admiring the work. The  
spider was still there. It  
seemed very excited.